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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires completed by 53 high school age students from the Voyaguer Outward Bound School (VOBS) were analyzed to determine how well the program met the perceived needs/expectations of the students. Prior to the course, participants ranked the 17 course components in order of perceived importance, and following the course they indicated how effectively each component was delivered. Importance and performance ratings were plotted on a matrix divided into four quadrants: (1) highest importance and highest performance; (2) lower importance and high performance; (3) lower importance and low performance; and (4) high importance and low performance. Results indicated the VOBS successfully met the expectations of students in the areas of overall course rating, expedition/wilderness travel, solo, skills training, first aid/emergency care training, and rock climbing. Components rated very important but judged low in performance were whitewater activities, food quality, basecamp activities, group dynamics, ropes course, and transportation arrangements. These items should receive priority attention in program improvement efforts while items rated low in importance and performance warrant less attention, and items rated low in importance and high in performance can be left alone. The importance-performance matrix can help managers evaluate programs and compete more successfully in the outdoor/experiential education market. (JHZ)

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IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE EVALUATION: A METHOD OF DISCERNING SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM COMPONENTS.

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IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE EVALUATION: A METHOD OF DISCERNING SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to: 1) determine the relative importance of various program components as perceived by selected participants, and; 2) determine how effectively each of these program components was delivered by the organization.

Procedures: 53 high school age subjects (35 male, 18 female) from the Voyaguer Outward Bound School (VOBS) were asked to complete a questionnaire before their course allowing them to indicate the relative importance of 17 course components. After completing the course they were then asked how effectively each of the components was delivered.

The results of both the importance and performance ratings were plotted on a matrix divided into four quadrants (diagram I). Quadrant I indicates items of highest importance and highest performance. Items falling into this quadrant suggest that the program did a good job of meeting these important needs and should be commended for doing so.

Quadrant II indicated those program items which are of lower importance, but were rated high in performance. Items in this catagory indicate that a good job is being done in delivering these items, but that additional efforts are probably not warranted.

Quadrant III indicated items of lower importance but also ranked low in performance. This indicates that some attention is needed in improving the delivery of these items, but they are not of relative importance to warrant a great deal of effort.

Quadrant IV, however, is the most critical in terms of program evaluation. This quadrant includes items which are of high importance but were rated low in performance. These program items should receive priority attention.

Results: A Friedman two-way analysis of variance was utilized to determine any significant differences between ratings of course components. Analysis indicates that a significant ranking structure does exist between course components.

Further analysis of the importance-performance grid (diagram II) suggests that the most concern should be given those six items plotted in the upper left corner. These items were rated very important but judged low in performance:

1. Whitewater Activities
2. Food Quality
3. Basecamp Activities
4. Group Dynamics
5. Ropes Course
6. Transportation Arrangements

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Those items rated low in importance and low in performance by the students are plotted in the lower left quadrant. These items need improvement but don't warrant the attention of the items listed above:

1. Pre-Breakfast Activities
2. Closing Ceremony
3. Marathon
4. Service Project

Items in the upper right quadrant were rated highest in both importance and performance. VOBS is more than meeting student needs in these important areas:

1. Overall Course Rating
2. Expedition/Wilderness Travel
3. Solo
4. Skills Training
5. First Aid/Emergency Care Training
6. Rock Climbing

The above findings suggest that VOBS successfully met the needs of these students in several important areas. VOBS failed, however, to fulfill student expectation in other areas. Specifically, the group arrived expecting a great deal from their course with respect to whitewater activities, food quality, and the ropes course, but were not satisfied with the delivery of these items.

Finally, it should be pointed out that a disparity seems to exist between the importance rankings of this group of high school age students and the rankings identified by adult students in earlier studies. Although further investigation is necessary, it appears that this disparity may be attributed to differences in the needs and expectations of the two groups, possibly requiring different program designs for different groups if these expectations are to be fulfilled.

Discussion: As competition for a share of the outdoor/experiential education market continues to increase, new and innovative program evaluation and marketing techniques must be adopted in order to attract users and deliver a superior product to an increasingly hard-to-please market. The importance-performance tool is a simple and effective means for program managers to accomplish this difficult task.

Diagram 1. IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE MATRIX

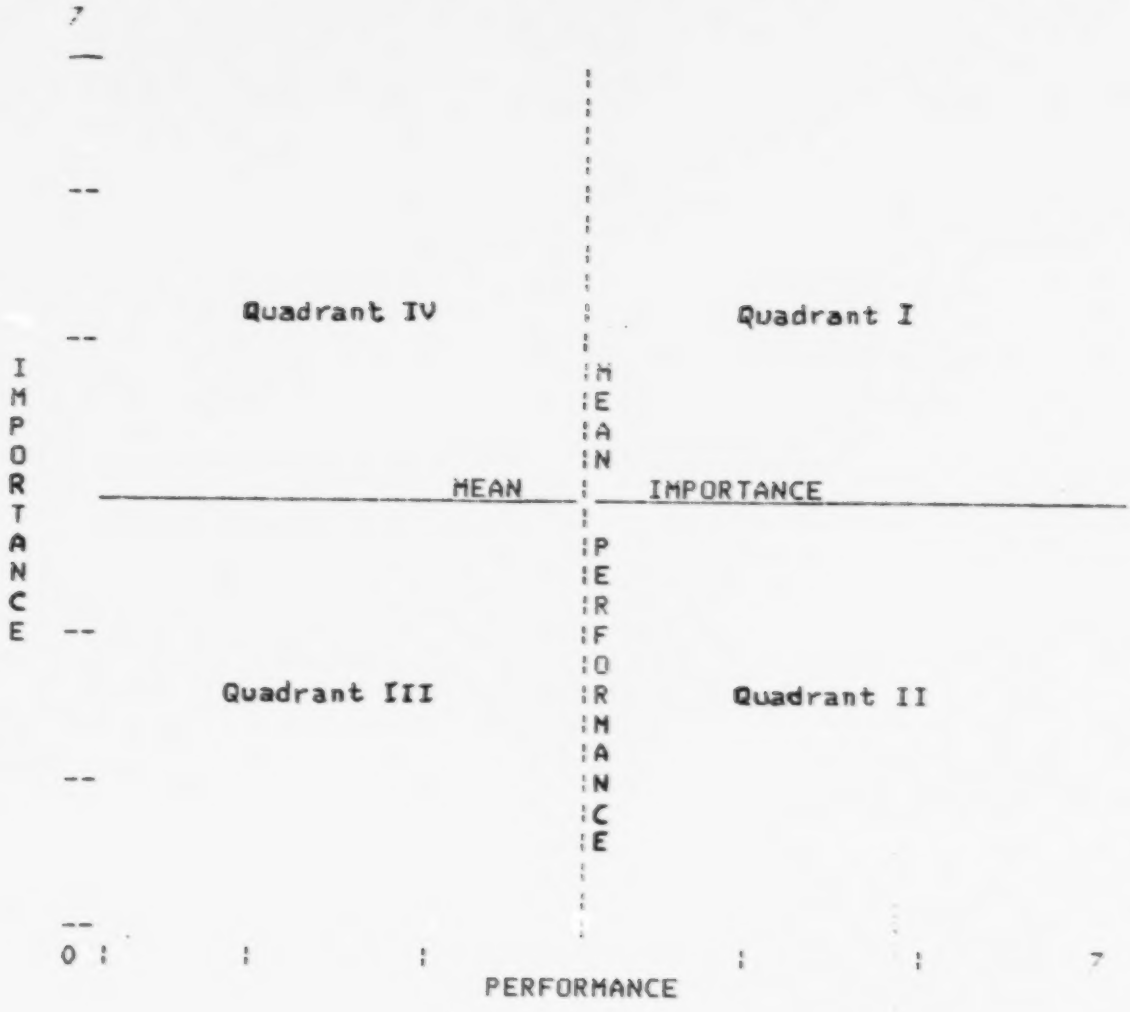

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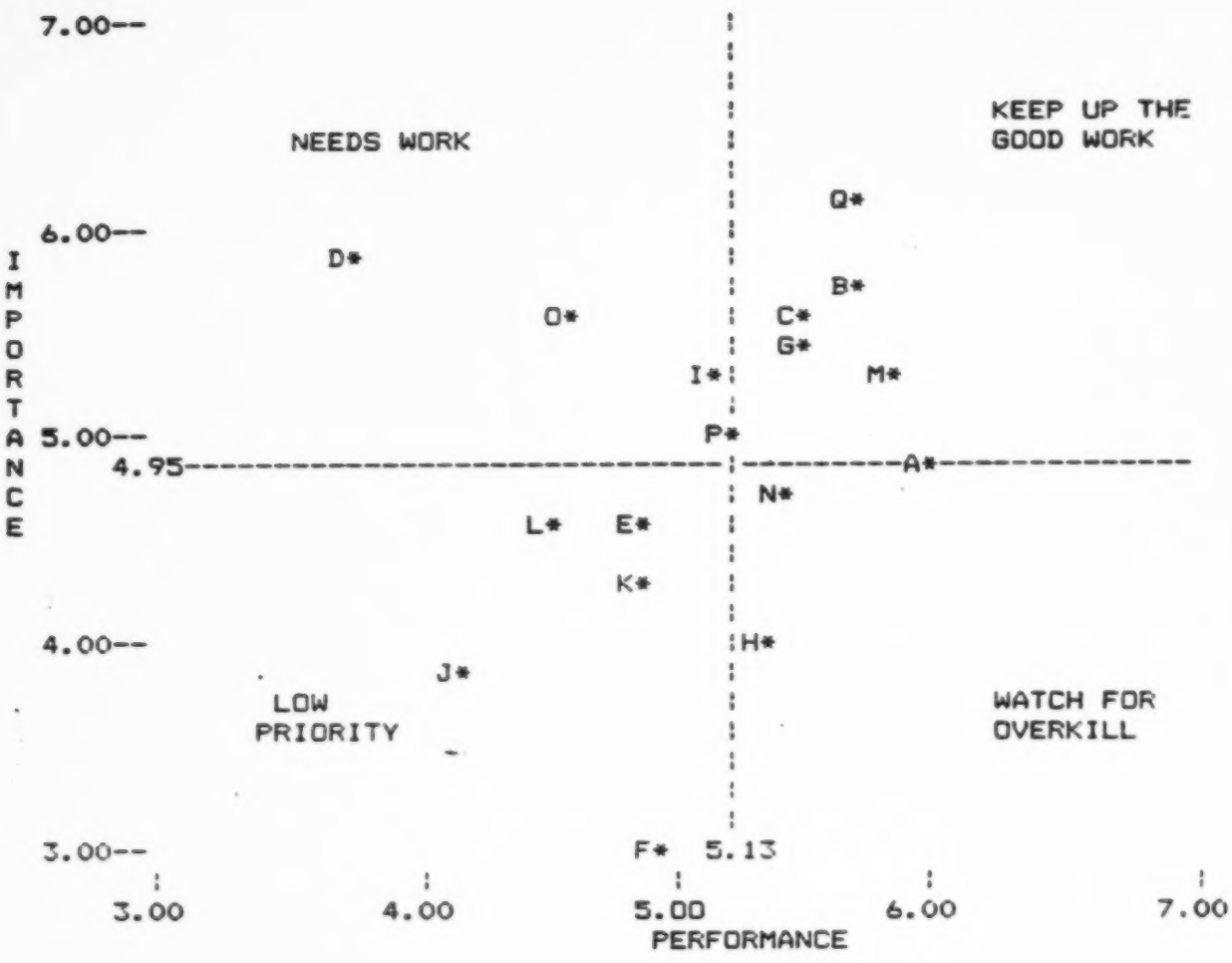
DIAGRAM II. IMPORTANCE - PERFORMANCE MATRIX



	$\bar{X}$ IMPORTANCE	$\bar{X}$ PERFORMANCE
A. Rock Climbing/Rapelling	4.98	6.04
B. Expeditions/Wilderness Travel	5.77	5.75
C. Solo	5.55	5.63
D. Whitewater Activities	3.84	3.78
E. Group Dynamics	4.6	4.92
F. Marathon	2.85	5.02
G. Skills Training	5.38	5.51
H. Service Project	4.07	5.20
I. Ropes Course	5.24	5.10
J. Pre-breakfast Activities	3.90	4.16
K. Closing Ceremony	4.25	4.90
L. Basecamp Activities	4.44	4.55
M. First Aid Training	5.22	5.84
N. Pre-Course Correspondence	4.84	5.41
O. Food Quality	5.51	4.61
P. Transportation	5.07	5.14
Q. Overall Course Rating	6.16	5.73

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